

**ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE**

Systems and methods to operate upon a nonplanar top surface of a conductive surface layer of a workpiece, so as to, for example, preserve the structural integrity of a dielectric film layer disposed below the conductive surface layer, are presented. According to an exemplary method, a layer of conducting material such as a conducting paste is applied over the nonplanar top surface of the conductive surface layer to obtain a planar top surface. At least a portion of the conducting material layer and at least a portion of the conductive surface layer are removed in a planar manner to at least partially planarize the nonplanar top surface. The conducting material layer may be annealed so that the conducting material layer diffuses with the conductive surface layer prior to removal of at least the portions of conducting material layer and the conductive surface layer.

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